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SUBJECT: SE WILLIAMSON MEETING WITH DARFURI CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS

REF: A) KHARTOUM 1108
B) KHARTOUM 1167

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On August 10, Special Envoy Williamson held two separate meetings with Darfuri civil society leaders to discuss the peace process in Darfur, humanitarian concerns and insecurity in the region. The leaders painted a dire picture of the situation on the ground, underscored by rampant violence and a severe food shortage that could result in famine. In the search for a political solution, they argued that rebel leaders do not adequately represent the citizens of Darfur. They told Special Envoy Williamson that a broader spectrum of Darfuris must be involved in the peace process. The leaders asserted that civil society groups in particular are intellectually and morally better equipped than the rebels to promote peace and reconciliation. They also emphasized the need for indigenous methods of reconciliation, in accordance with Darfuri customs and traditions. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On August 10, Special Envoy Williamson held two separate meetings with a diverse group of Darfuri civil society leaders, including: Ahmed Abd Rahaman Rejal, the Maqdoom (viceroy) of South Darfur; Idriss Yusuf Ahmed, Secretary of the Darfur Shura Council; Suliman Ishag, SPLM Head of South Darfur and Secretary General of Al Tajuma Al Ahli, a largely Fur civil society group; Dr. Waleed Madibbo (from the Baggara Rizeigat Arab tribe), President of Governance Bureau, a consultancy; Dr. Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Khartoum; former General Siddig Mohamed Ismail, Secretary General of Sons of Darfur Forum for Dialogue & Peaceful Coexistence; and Aisha Abubakr Subaira Adam, Coordinator of Peace and Development at the Community Development Association. Though the participants came from different segments of Darfuri society, they shared many similar views in regard to the situation on the ground, the rebel leadership, the role of civil society, and the path to peace and reconciliation.

DIRE SITUATION ON THE GROUND
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¶3. (SBU) The civil society leaders painted a dire picture of the situation on the ground, one characterized by increasingly rampant insecurity. Dr. Madibbo noted that "areas considered relatively secure (such as parts of South Darfur) are in fact not secure at all," adding gangs of bandits operate there with impunity. Of greater concern, according to the leaders, is the severe food shortage resulting from the decrease in food aid and absence of local production as farmers are afraid to cultivate their fields. Prices of food have skyrocketed, and the civil society leaders stated there was imminent danger of increased hunger, especially for groups of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who are cut off from humanitarian aid. Waleed Madibbo also expressed concern about the deepening ethnic divide in Darfur between the Zaghawa and the region's other tribes stoked by the regime (Reftel A). Special Envoy

Williamson replied that the U.S. maintains its strong political and financial commitment to achieving peace in Darfur, and will continue to advocate full deployment of deployment as the best option to increase security and facilitate humanitarian efforts.

DIM VIEW OF REBEL LEADERS

14. (SBU) Responding to Special Envoy Williamson's question on how they view Darfur's rebel leaders, the civil society leaders shared the view that the rebel leaders are "sons of Darfur" but not adequately representing citizens of Darfur. They characterized the rebel leaders as out of touch with the pain and suffering felt by ordinary people. "Abdul Wahid has fought for our cause," noted the Magdoo, "but he does not speak for people on the ground." And no matter how powerful rebel leaders are, said Dr. Madibbo, they "cannot force their views on grassroots communities." Furthermore, the civil society leaders do not view rebel groups as competent to produce a peaceful solution to the conflict. "People who are armed are never going to be a part of the peace process," said Idriss Yusuf Ahmed, and Dr. Abdul-Jalil wryly predicted that "at some point there will be another peace agreement signed between the parties to manipulate violence" in Darfur.

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

15. (SBU) In contrast to their views of the rebel groups, the civil society leaders said their grassroots efforts articulate the needs and wants of the citizens of Darfur. They pointed to the recent Dar Es Salaam Declaration (Reftel B), which offers recommendations on power sharing, wealth sharing, land issues, and restitution by an

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impressive group of local leaders and intellectuals representing all of Darfur's peoples. They urged a greater role for civil society in future negotiations, noting its capacity for voicing the concerns of ordinary citizens. For example, Aisha Abubakr Subaira spoke of how civil society efforts have focused on the desire of Darfuri women to be considered in any prospective peace agreement. The latter must consider compensation for women who have lost properties and/or have been the victims of rape and other abuse. Subaira said that it was unlikely without such neither the rebels or government would be willing to acknowledge and address such gender-based issues. Civil society can also "fill the gaps" on what is needed in peace agreements, said Dr. Madibbo, citing perceived vagueness relating to compensation in the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA).

16. (SBU) The leaders claimed that despite the potential of their civil society groups to promote peace and reconciliation, such activities were still stifled by security forces through restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly and other intimidation. "Right now, there is no civil society as such, but there are agents for civic action," said Dr. Abdul-Jalil. These restrictions have driven civil society organizers to hold conferences abroad, such as the Dar Es Salaam Conference and similar events held in Heidelberg, Germany and the United Kingdom. But as the Magdoo pointed out, "If there's anything to be done [in Darfur], we need to be free. Free to meet, to move around, and to consult our people." The leaders urged the international community to support efforts to build civil society by providing resources and the auspices under which they could meet and organize. They noted, if Darfur is to stabilize soon, we need to acquire some of the essential tools for nation building." They strongly urged that some international assistance for Darfur needs to be development and not just humanitarian aid, starting in some relatively stable communities like El-Daein.

INDIGENOUS SOLUTIONS

17. (SBU) The civil society leaders strongly believe that although the trouble in Darfur originated with outside influences ("the international community underestimates the NCP's capacity for manipulation"), the solutions for such problems must come from within. Dr. Abdul-Jalil noted that there is evidence that local communities have come to recognize this, citing pacts made in

several communities between nomadic former militias and local cultivators with regard to grazing rights. The Maqdoom recalled how disputes had been handled during the country's Condominium period. (Note: "Condominium" refers to British-Egyptian colonial rule in Sudan dominated by Britain with Egypt reduced to a largely symbolic role. Begun in the late 19th century, the "condominium" lasted until Sudanese independence in 1956) He said that disagreements were handled outside of state courts by tribal elders, and suggested current intertribal conflict and grievances could be settled in a similar fashion, perhaps in a gathering of tribal leaders under the auspices of the UN or AU. In contrast to indigenous efforts, government-orchestrated reconciliations were, in the view of the leaders, basically ineffective.

DISTRUST OF THE NCP

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18. (SBU) Throughout their discussion with Special Envoy Williamson, the civil society leaders expressed a deep distrust of the National Congress Party (NCP). The elderly but feisty Maqdoom noted that the NCP's disarmament of the Fur tribe in the 1990s sowed the seeds for the current conflict, while Idriss Yusuf Ahmed maintained that everyone in Darfur, even the Arabs, realize that "it is the government's policy to keep Darfur unsettled." They did not view the NCP regime as a reliable signatory, citing its lack of implementation of the DPA and its wavering on CPA commitments. Due to this lack of trust between Darfurians and the regime, Suliman Ishag suggested that the Darfur file be transferred to the SPLM, which he noted already has relations with the rebel factions in Darfur. He argued this would also give a chance for the SPLM to re-attempt to unify the movements, or at least their armed forces. (Note: Ishag is the SPLM Chairman of South Darfur. End Note.)

19. (SBU) COMMENT: If they can be properly mobilized, civil society groups may be able to provide a forum for the voices of Darfur's citizens and allow them to play a role in peace negotiations and reconciliation efforts. This is a role, according to the civil society leaders, that rebel groups and their leaders are unsuited to play. A solution to Darfur that focuses solely on warlords and rebels, and not on Darfur's people (especially alienated IDPs), will probably fail.

10. (U) SE Williamson cleared this cable prior to transmission.

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FERNANDEZ